

Sunday 12th September 2021

Emily's Commissioning

(Exodus 3:1-15)

Today's service gives us an opportunity to celebrate and pray for two new beginnings – the beginning of our new programme of All Age worship – 'Worship@4', and the beginning of a new ministry – Emily's ministry here, among us, as our 'shiny new' Young People's Minister!

In respect of the latter, this 'new beginning' actually marks the end of a process – the process of calling, choosing and sending, through which I believe God has led us, and led Emily

Being called and chosen is a wonderful thing, especially for the Christian, and any of us who are in Christian ministry, or for that matter, any of us who are part of the worshipping community, have, I believe, been called and chosen! So, let's not forget that, as I will come back to it in a minute!

But first, let's delve into this wonderful reading from the Book of Exodus – the famous account of Moses and the burning bush!

I'm going to pull out three things which seem significant: firstly, that theme of being called, chosen and sent. Secondly, that this represents meeting place with God. And thirdly, that those two things together, brought about a turning point!

Let's take a quick look at each of them firstly, then, **that Moses was called, chosen and sent:**

Calls can be difficult!

God calls Moses to return to Egypt, from which he has been banished, and to confront the same Pharaoh who had wanted to kill him as a child, and to be the means through which the Israelite people are set

free from slavery and led into their own land – the promised land of God! No pressure, then, Moses!

And when all this happens, Moses is just minding his own business, doing the everyday duty of looking after his father-in-law's sheep. And then, God breaks into the scene, and we have one of the great moments of the Old Testament, one of the great moments of God disclosing himself in all of scripture, perhaps, even, one of the great moments of history, as God calls to Moses from the middle of the burning bush!

"Here I am," says Moses. And God says, "Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

All of which brings us neatly to the second point – that this is a **Meeting Place with God.**

It's worth remembering that Moses was just going about his daily work in an ordinary place, when God chose to break into his life!

God's promise is that he is with us always, wherever we are - at work, at the supermarket, in a traffic jam, at a committee meeting, at home, in the garden wherever!

But the reality is, that for most of us, these places may not feel like holy ground at all! And if they don't, why is that?

Maybe it's because they are such familiar places, or maybe it's because nothing special has ever happened there? There are probably all sorts of reasons.

But - and here's the thing - if a place is holy ground because of God's presence, and if we believe God's promise that He is with us always, if God is everywhere that we are, then everywhere we go is holy ground?

And that realisation, in itself, must surely be life-changing? Which in turn brings us to the third thing – that this is a **Turning Point!**

And it's a turning point, not just for Moses, but for the whole Israelite people living in exile in Egypt. Such a call, and such an encounter with God will always be life-changing – anyone who has felt called by God into whatever role, will know that there can be no turning back if they are to remain true to themselves and to God!

So, back to Emily's new Ministry, and maybe to the question, 'why did the four of us (myself, Susan, Claire and Emma from the Diocese, who interviewed Emily back in July, choose to appoint her? Well I speak on behalf of us, but in the hope that the other two others present won't want to disagree. Three things, which fit neatly with those other three things I have pulled out of the Bible passage:

- Firstly, as we talked with Emily, and listened to what she had to say, we sensed that in her there was this necessary sense of being called! She may not be called to lead the Israelites out of exile, but for someone who has lived their whole life in Leeds, being called to tell the young people and families of Surrey about Jesus Christ, may feel just like that!
- Secondly, I think we sensed that Emily was well equipped to be able to lead our young people into the presence of God, to the Holy ground that awaits them.
- And finally today, and this appointment, represent a turning point in Emily's life, and a turning point in the life of our Church – in the words of the song which we will sing at the end of the service: '*. . . . and it's from the old we travel to the new*'. And in the time that Emily spent with us back in July, she was clearly one who seemed to recognise the need and the urgency, for that turning around, in order to be effective in ministering to our young people!

And these things seem to be at the heart of what being a Christian Minister is all about – so here she is – Young People’s Minister in the Parish and Community of Cranleigh!

‘Holy Ground experiences’ point us in the direction of our heavenly home! In them we can be uplifted in the amazing truth that God is giving us a little foretaste of the wonderful things that he has in store for us when our earthly lives come to an end!

There is no doubt that the twentieth century Welsh poet-priest, RS Thomas understood this perfectly, when he wrote his poem *‘The Bright Field’*

In this short poem he compares the experience of seeing the sun shine on a small field, with the parables of Jesus in which he talks about the ‘Pearl of Great Price’ and the ‘Treasure hidden in a field’, and then with the experience of Moses and the Burning Bush – all of them pointing in the direction of eternity:

*I have seen the sun break through
to illuminate a small field for a while,
and gone my way and forgotten it.*

*But that was the pearl of great price,
the one field that had treasure in it.
I realize now that I must give all that I have to possess it.*

*Life is not hurrying on to a receding future,
nor hankering after an imagined past.
It is the turning aside, like Moses,
to the miracle of the lit bush,
to a brightness that seemed as
transitory as your youth once,
but is the eternity that awaits you.*

Emily, we are all walking that path to eternity and we are delighted that God has called you, to turn aside your life, and to share a part of the journey with us, as we together seek to draw our young people to the journey that will lead them, with us, to that 'fullness of life' that Jesus promised us, and into bright joy of God's eternal presence!